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ABSTRACT

This document reports on the major activities carried out and the major findings produced by the Counseling for High Skills Project. Using a customer satisfaction approach, data were collected from 39,940 currently enrolled students in 2,145 programs in 361 postsecondary institutions in 14 states. The study examined what kinds of persons enroll in postsecondary sub-baccalaureate career-oriented educational institutions and programs; how people make decisions to enroll; how students adjust to life after enrollment; how students rate the institutions they are attending; and employment experiences of former students six months after leaving the institutions. These data were summarized on computer disks and provided to school counselors. Studies found that counselors judged the disks to be useful to them when helping students make decisions regarding their postsecondary plans. Results show that when furnished with pertinent data and information, many of today's school counselors are highly motivated to try helping all secondary school leavers concerning their needs to seek some kind of postsecondary education that will equip them with skills needed in tomorrow's occupational society. School counselors have demonstrated the usefulness of career development information supplied them by the Counseling for High Skills Project in helping students make more informed and reasoned decision regarding postsecondary education. (MKA)

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# The 70% Solution: Meeting the Need for High Skills

Kenneth B. Hoyt

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# The 70% Solution: Meeting the Need for High Skills

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## Overview

While approximately 70% of high school graduates enter college each Fall, only 30% of them are predicted to eventually obtain a four-year college degree. Even this reduced number will create an annual over supply of about 300,000 college graduates who, if they want employment, will find it necessary to enter occupations that do not demand a four-year college degree (Shelley, 1996).

In terms of educational requirements, the kinds of jobs growing at the fastest rate are those demanding career skills that are acquired through one to two years of postsecondary career-oriented sub-baccalaureate education (*OOQ* Spring, 1994)).

## Discussion

In 1992 the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund made a $3.3 million grant to establish and operate the "Counseling For High Skills" (CHS) project at Kansas State University. Headed by Dr. K. B. Hoyt, this project sought to increase the knowledge, expertise, and commitment of school counselors in helping almost *all* high school students consider enrollment in some kind of postsecondary career-oriented education.

CHS began by electing to use a "customer satisfaction" approach to data collection. That approach asked currently enrolled and former postsecondary students to answer the kinds of questions most often asked by high school students contemplating enrollment at these institutions. It was reasoned that, if current and former students respond to these questions in a positive manner, chances increase that prospective students who later enroll there would also be likely to react favorably to the institution.

In constructing customer satisfaction items for use in this project, questions were worded in such a way that currently enrolled and former postsecondary students would be considered the "experts" in answering each question. In addition to this kind of item, each institution was encouraged to provide prospective students with information where *it* —the *institution*— is properly considered to be the expert in answering the question. For example, the *institution* might be asked to answer the question "How many books are in the institution's library?" while current *students* would be asked to answer the question, "How easy do students find it to check books out of the library?"

Second, CHS developed a standardized approach to collecting data that calls for personnel from each participating institution to collect its own information. In an attempt to reduce the "halo effect", the key point made in collecting data was to make sure present and former students supplying the data understand its primary purpose is to help prospective students decide whether or not this would be a good program for *them*. It was strongly emphasized that the primary purpose is neither to "help" nor to "hurt" the institutions. Rather, the primary purpose was to collect data that would help prospective students make better decisions. This makes the CHS methods quite different from many other assessment approaches.

Third, data collected from currently enrolled postsecondary students have been reported by *program-by- institution* and distributed to each participating institution and to school counselors statewide on computer disks. These data are useful in individual counseling- as well as in group counseling procedures and institutional self study. Several major categories of data have been devised and used.

A wide variety of good jobs exist that do not require a four-year college degree (Cosca, *OOQ*, 1994-1995). Other literature demonstrates that, when occupations are organized by educational level required for performance, almost two in five job openings expected to exist during the 1996-2006 period will require no more than two to three weeks of on-the-job training and no specified kind or amount of formal education. Further, it shows that, while one in three job openings will require some form of postsecondary education, only about one in four will require a four-year college degree or more ( *OOQ*, Winter, 1997-98). Clear implications of need for school counselor change in role and function are apparent when these kinds of data are studied (Feller, R., and Walz, G, 1996).

A few illustrative examples of findings from this study are presented below:

- What kinds of persons enroll in postsecondary sub-baccalaureate career-oriented educational institutions and programs?
    1. Of students under age 25, a majority (53%) are males. Of those age 25 and/or older, a majority (58%) are females.
    2. More than one in five reported they had "some college but no degree."
    3. High school courses recommended by these students bear a remarkable similarity to some currently popular educational reform proposals.
- How do persons make decisions to enroll in postsecondary career institutions?
    1. Friends (1 in 3), not counselors (1 in 10), are the most common source of information from which current postsecondary students learned about the institutions they attend.
    2. Almost as many students (26%) choose the institution they attend because it is close to where they live as choose the institution because it offers the kinds of courses they want (31%).
- How have students adjusted to life in postsecondary career-oriented institutions?
    1. Two in three students are employed full-time or part-time while enrolled.
    2. Motivation to learn does not appear to be a problem for these students.
    3. Most of these students report having little difficulty with either (a) housing or (b) costs.
- How do current students rate the postsecondary institutions they are attending?

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1. More than 8 in 10 students rate their institutions either as "outstanding" (29%) or as good" (57%)
2. A clear majority of these current students would recommend the institution they attend to students still in high school but sizable differences exist among them.
3. About 1 in 4 students report "all" of their instructors know them well. Another 1 in 3 report "most" of their instructors know them well.

- What are the employment experiences of former students 6 months after leaving the institution?
  1. Three in four reported that, if they had it to do again, they would enroll in the same institution and choose the same program.
  2. Two in three judged the first jobs they obtained after leaving the institution to be better than the last job they had prior to entering the institution.
  3. Three in four reported the first job they obtained after leaving the institution to be better than they had expected it would be.
  4. One in three rated the job placement assistance they received from the institution as "low".

### A Recommended Course of Action

1. Recognize and emphasize that the concept of "excellence" is applicable to all kinds and levels of education.
2. Provide *all* secondary school leavers with a set of general employability-adaptability-promotability skills needed for attaining excellence in the emerging information society.
3. Emphasize the variety of opportunities for quality postsecondary career-oriented education that are available at the sub-baccalaureate level without devaluing the social and economic benefits of four-year colleges.
4. Help approximately 300,000 four-year college graduates annually prepare for and secure employment in occupations not requiring a four-year college degree.
5. Make high quality, career development assistance and high quality jobs available to women, minorities, and persons with handicaps.

### Conclusions

This document is intended to report the major activities carried out and the major findings produced from the Counseling For High Skills Project.

Using a "customer satisfaction" approach, data were collected from 39,940 currently enrolled students in 2,145 programs in 361 postsecondary institutions in 14 states. These data were summarized on computer disks and provided to school counselors. When counselor use of these disks in helping students make decisions regarding their postsecondary plans was studied, it was found that counselors judged the disks to be useful to them (Hoyt, 1999).

It is concluded that, when furnished with pertinent data and information, many of today's school counselors are highly motivated to try helping all secondary school leavers concerning their needs to seek some kind of postsecondary education that will equip them with skills needed in tomorrow's occupational society. It is further concluded that school counselors have demonstrated the usefulness of career development information supplied them by the Counseling for High Skills Project in helping students make more informed and reasoned decisions regarding postsecondary education.

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